

Columbus Dispatch columnist Thomas Suddes weighs in on the EdChoice voucher litigation matter.

In his May 28 Dispatch column, Suddes contrasts the Cleveland Metropolitan School District voucher program included in the 1995-1997 state budget with the scope and amount of the current voucher scheme. He points to the Ohio Constitution's stance on public money going to religious private schools:

"So, beginning with the 1995-1997 state budget, and initially only in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, GOP legislators created a "pilot" private school voucher plan that in the 28 years since has become five separate state voucher programs.

According to the Legislative Service Commission, the five programs cost the state \$555 million in the fiscal year that ended last June. That's money that otherwise could have gone to public schools. And the legislature wants to further expand school vouchers in Ohio, regardless of the Ohio Constitution's demand that the legislature must provide "a thorough and efficient system of common schools" — public schools — "throughout the state."

One might also consider the constitution's stance on public money going to non-public schools with religious links: "No religious or other sect, or sects, shall ever have any exclusive right to, or control of, any part of the school funds of this state." That went out the window with 1965's "fair bus bill," letting non-public pupils ride publicly owned school buses, and 1967's "auxiliary services law," which provides pupils in non-public schools in Ohio with some state programs.

The premise of those measures, which courts upheld, is that the state was helping pupils personally, as Ohio citizens, not their denominations. And the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Cleveland school voucher plan in June 2002.

Meanwhile, the General Assembly's Republican leaders have cemented into place their power by drawing GOP-skewed districts for the Ohio House of Representatives and the Senate, then defying the Ohio Supreme Court on the issue."

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